

# **Inclusive Education in South African Further and Higher Education**

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# **Inclusive Education in South African Further and Higher Education: Reflections on Equity, Access, and Inclusion**

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**Erratum:** It has come to the attention of the publisher that the book (2025), "Prelims", Makoelle, T.M. and Mosito, C.P. (Ed.) *Inclusive Education in South African Further and Higher Education: Reflections on Equity, Access, and Inclusion*, Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. i–xix. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83608-944-520251046>, incorrectly listed the biographical information for the author Heloise Sathorar on the 'About the Contributors' page. This error was introduced in the production process and has now been corrected in the print and online versions. The publisher sincerely apologizes for this error and for any inconvenience caused.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# Preface

The advent of the new political dispensation in South Africa in 1994 has seen the new government embark on the transformation of education, in particular, the higher education sector. The Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (DoE, 1997) was the first step in the process of redressing the imbalances of the past as a result of the apartheid policy advocating for separate development for different racial groups. The unequal provision of education for different races perpetuated class differences and made quality higher and further education inaccessible to Africans, coloureds, and Indians. In order to ensure the equitable distribution of resources in higher education, the Ministry of Education embarked on several processes, among others, the university measures and the establishment of further education and training institutions. Regarding the university managers, the traditionally non-white higher education institutions were absorbed by the traditionally white-only institutions that were well-resourced. However, issues of access and exclusion, such as epistemic access, lack of support for students with disability, and student dropout persisted. Reorganisation of higher education institutions with the establishment of inclusion university councils, transformation offices, and institutional forums were measures put in place to accelerate redress, inclusion, access, and equity in these institutions of higher learning.

While the adoption of White Paper 6 in 2001 has seen more concerted effort in ensuring inclusion and social justice in secondary education, implementing inclusion in higher and further education took time to kick start. As a result of the implementation of inclusion in secondary education, the throughput of students from this level to the tertiary level has seen an increase in the number of students with disabilities in higher and further education. It is estimated that 1% of students in colleges and universities are with either a disability or special needs. As a result, colleges and universities face the major task of ensuring that higher and further education is accessible, equitable, and inclusive. Institutions of higher learning are focussed on redress, and processes such as decolonisation of curriculum, transformation of institutional cultures, and other related transformational endeavours are all aimed at making higher and further education inclusive.

Therefore, the idea of this book was born of the need to take stock of the developments regarding the implementation of inclusive education and the general process of ensuring access, equity, inclusion, and social justice in the South African higher and further education landscape. The editorial of this book, first, Tsediso Michael Makoelle, Professor of Inclusive Education and School Leadership, brings a wealth of international experience in both higher and secondary

education that could contribute to a deeper understanding of inclusion in higher and further education. Second, Cina P. Mosito, an Associate Professor of Inclusive Education with extensive experience in South African higher education teacher education, brings a depth of knowledge in the sphere of inclusive pedagogy.

As a result, this volume gives a reflective account of how sound institutions of higher learning in South Africa have responded so far to the mandate to ensure equity, access, and inclusion as promulgated in the relevant policies (2013 Education White for Post School Education, 2001 Education White Paper 6, and 1997 White Paper 3).

The volume provides an analysis of the South African higher education system's response to the concepts of equity, access, and inclusion, and highlights how these concepts have evolved, been enacted, and practised in the higher education institutions of South Africa since 2001. It also highlights some challenges, successes, and opportunities that prevail in those institutions of higher learning as a result of their attempts to make higher education accessible in order to widen the participation of all students in teaching and learning. Therefore, this volume makes an interesting read for educationists, higher education scholars, students, researchers, policymakers, and civil society organisations.

*Tsediso Michael Makoelle and Cina P. Mosito*

## **Reference**

Department of Education (DoE). (1997). Higher Education Act no 101 of 1997. Government Printers.

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction: Towards an Inclusive Higher Education

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### Abstract

This introduction provides an overview of the book's content by providing an introductory orientation on inclusive education in higher education (HE) internationally. The background of inclusion in HE within the South African context is provided. The introduction also provides the conceptual framework on which the book is based, as well as the methodology. The executive summary of the book is provided to give a snapshot of the focus of the chapters' contents.

*Keywords:* Inclusive higher education; inclusive education; inclusion; equity; access; social justice

### Inclusive Education in HE

According to [Moriña \(2017\)](#), the need for inclusive HE systems has increased as diverse students, including those with special needs and disability from secondary education, are now enrolled in institutions of higher learning to pursue HE. However, the implementation of inclusive education in institutions of higher learning is not without its challenges. It is influenced by several variables such as finance, resources, faculty preparedness competence, etc. The fact that some institutions are autonomous and subscribe to academic freedom might either be an enabler or a hindrance to the implementation of inclusive education.

The emphasis on throughputs and completion rates at institutions of higher learning may pose a risk for neglect of students who are at risk or need additional support to make a success in their learning. The increasing levels of diversity at the institutions of higher learning might pose a serious barrier to effective inclusion and access. [Moriña \(2017\)](#) postulates that although institutions of higher learning have become more diverse, the focus of inclusion in HE is still heavily directed towards students with disabilities. In their work, [Salha and Albadawi \(2021\)](#) stress the need for a participatory process in the implantation of inclusive education in institutions of higher learning. They believe that all stakeholders, including students, should be part of the discussions. [Svendby \(2024\)](#) believes that inclusion in HE institutions has to be obligatory and that it should be infused into the curriculum and the training of lecturers and instructors. The institutions are paced at the centre for the attainment of sustainable development goal 4 of the 2030 agenda to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. Therefore, the implementation of inclusion in institutions of higher learning calls for renewal of academic planning, pedagogical and curriculum design, infrastructure redesign, deployment of assistive technologies, and the development of an inclusive culture, which may widen and broaden the participation of diverse students in teaching and learning ([Makoelle, 2022](#)).

## **The South African Context**

Following the Higher Education Act (DOE, 1997), the adoption of the notion of inclusive education led to the adoption of relevant policies: Education White Paper for Post-School Education (DHET, 2013), Education White Paper 6 (DOE, 2001), and White Paper 3 (CHE, 1997). These policy frameworks aim to redress the past exclusive practices within the South African Education system. They are also oriented towards understanding and implementing inclusion from access, equity, and inclusion, as well as social justice and human rights perspectives. The historical context of apartheid continues to bear the hallmarks in HE. South African HE landscape experiences multiple barriers, and institutions of higher learning have embarked on the transformation process towards inclusion to redress past inequities. The institutions of higher learning are in the process of revising the curriculum and exploring different strategies to support students with diverse needs. The institutions of higher learning are grappling with the management of diversity, including gender, language, technology, and leadership, and how those impact access, equity, and inclusion. Institutions of higher learning are implementing inclusion amidst the process of decolonisation of the curriculum in HE and attempting to incorporate indigenous pieces of knowledge and Afro-centric knowledge in the HE curriculum. The technical and vocational education and training institutions (TVETs) are being positioned as centred on youth skills development.

The post-apartheid era saw the South African government promulgate a range of policies for building an inclusive education system. One of these policies, White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, outlines how the education and training system must transform itself to contribute to establishing a caring and humane society, how it must change to accommodate the full range

of learning needs and the mechanisms that should be put in place (DOE, 2001). According to the White Paper 6 section 2.2.2.3, it was required that institutions of further and HE establish institutional-level support teams. As a result, in section 2.2.5, institutions of higher learning were mandated to develop institutional plans to increase the enrolment of students with special needs. In this process, physical access was to be prioritised, and more resources were to be invested to support students with disabilities and special needs in HE. Then in year 2023, which is 22 years later, it is important to review the process of the implementation of inclusive education by institutions of further and HE since the adoption of the White Paper in 2001.

The process of the implementation of inclusive education by further and HE institutions came into the fore amidst the university merging process, which was championed by the then Minister of Education, the late Mr Kader Asmal in 2004. According to Baloyi (2015), the merger was not only aimed at changing facilities and buildings but also to ensure that the doors of teaching and learning were open to all, regardless of ethnicity, race, and other barriers. To achieve epistemic access, universities had to undergo language changes, review their admissions policies, and enrol more students from disadvantaged rural backgrounds. The government restructured HE funding to ensure that there was a process by institutions of higher learning to redress the imbalances and injustices of exclusion that occurred in the past.

However, in 2015, the *fee-must-fall* campaign, which was student-led, took centre stage in demanding a reduction in the high cost of HE. In 2016, government announced that tuition would not be increased, but in 2017, fee increases were capped at 8%. Students viewed high fees at institutions of higher learning as a barrier to the education of mostly disadvantaged black majority students. Most sources point out that the drop rate of students in South African universities in various years/levels of study varies from 30% to 60% (Ntema, 2022). As a result, the indication is that inclusion, equity, and access have not been sufficiently addressed despite all institutional efforts. While universities are investing in first-year preparatory programmes, it seems as though the problem of students dropping away will not go away soon (Hlalele & Alexander, 2012). It is important to note that while the White Paper was aimed at redressing past injustices, it was not specific about strategies to accomplish this goal.

Through initial teacher education programmes, HE in South Africa is also tasked with preparing prospective teachers to graduate with knowledge, skills, and attitudes for inclusive teaching. In their report entitled 'The State of Inclusive Education in South Africa: Implications for Teacher Education and Training Programmes' Majoko et al. (2018) postulate that inclusive education is not well represented in teacher education courses. Fig. 1.1 illustrates the distribution of teacher education courses at South African universities with teacher education programmes.

While some universities have taken measures to incorporate courses on inclusive education in these teacher education programmes, the indication is that they are still lacking. As a consequence in this report, it is recommended that institutions of teacher training incorporate more courses on inclusive education within

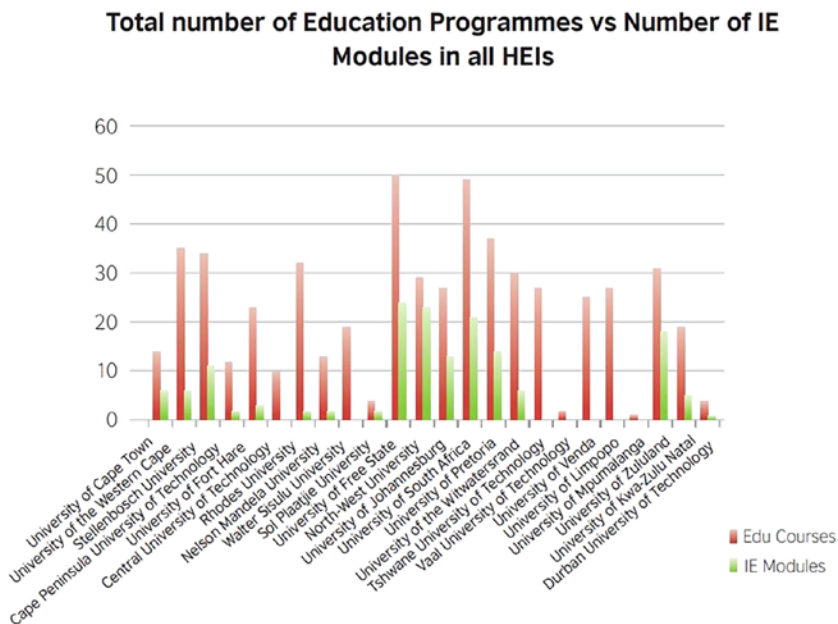


Fig. 1.1. Summary of Higher Education Programmes and Inclusive Education Modules. *Source:* Adapted from [Majoko et al. \(2018, p. 53\)](#).

the teacher education curriculum. Therefore, it becomes critical to understand how well institutions of higher learning in South Africa have responded so far to the mandate to ensure equity, access, and inclusion as promulgated in different policies (1995 White Paper on Education and Training, 1997 White Paper 3 A programme for Transformation of Higher Education, and 2001 Education White Paper 6).

It is also important to provide an analysis of the South African HE system’s response to the concepts of equity, access, and inclusion, highlighting how these concepts have evolved, been enacted, and practised in the HE institutions of South Africa since 2001. It further highlights some challenges, successes, and opportunities that prevail in those institutions of higher learning as a result of their attempts to make HE accessible and widen the participation of all students in teaching and learning.

### Conceptual Framework

Our approach to the discussions in this volume is inspired by the systems and ecological approach, which was used in many studies on inclusive education and support ([Tahir et al., 2019](#)) (in Schools) ([Hewett et al., 2019](#)) (in HE) which depart from the underlying assumptions that inclusion is nested within and across various interdependent components. In this volume, Bronfenbrenner’s

Bioecological Systems Theory is adopted as it assumes an interplay between the one who needs to be supported or included and the conditions surrounding him/her in the immediate environment or ecology. The theory was meant for the child's development through the support of the systems in the environment, i.e. the microsystem – composed of the support structures which are closest to the child, e.g. family; mesosystem – composed of connecting structures between microsystems, e.g. school; exosystem – made up of the broader societal structures, e.g. parents workplace; macrosystem – composed of values, customs, and traditions of the society; and chronosystem – denoting time and its relationship with the children development in the environment. While this theory was meant for the child's development and support, we adopted it as authors in this volume assume that educationally, at any given pedagogical moment, there is a child, student, and learner at all levels of education, including higher and further education that need support based on their educational need that might have been identified. Therefore, to address the educational needs of all students, the environmental systems are crucial.

The discussions in the chapters are organised into five strategic areas for inclusive education in the HE landscape. The organising areas anchored in various chapters are policy, human and physical aspects (leadership, gender, infrastructure, and technology), teaching and learning (curriculum, barriers, and assessment), philosophical aspects (decolonisation, indigenisation, and transformation), and organisational aspects (teacher education, TVET, and universities). Fig. 1.2 depicts how the thoughts and ideas in this volume are presented.

### ***Policy***

We recognise that HE is governed through a set of policies and principles. It is therefore important that while an understanding of policies is important, contributions from this volume are aimed at advancing new research and thus knowledge that could influence policy debates, conceptualisation, formulation, enactment, and consequently the implementation.

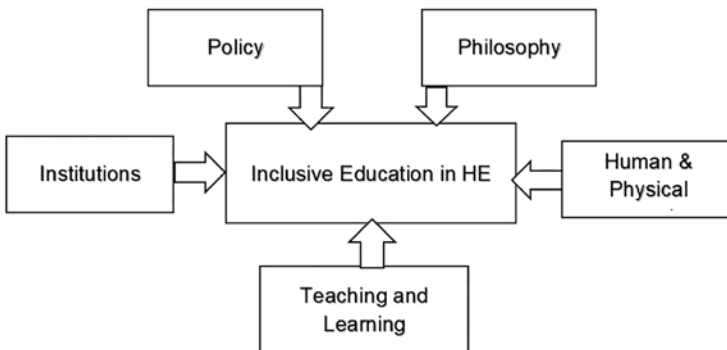


Fig. 1.2. Organising Areas of Inclusive Education in HE.

### ***Philosophical Aspects***

We are mindful that the implementation of inclusive education in HE coincided with the process of redress of the past imbalances of apartheid and the exclusion of other sections of society from benefiting from the fruits of HE as an economically empowering tool. In this volume, care is given that inclusive education comes amidst the processes of decolonising the curriculum and HE practices and the indigenisation process whereby indigenous knowledge systems are considered central to the decolonisation process.

### ***Institutions***

While inclusive education was originally targeted at primary and secondary education, we recognise that it is a multi-level phenomenon hence in this volume more focus is devoted to inclusive education in teacher training, TVET, and university education. We also recognise that it is multidisciplinary and that the principles of inclusivity cut across all education sectors and are geared towards equity, access, and social justice.

### ***Human and Physical Resources***

Inclusion is a collaborative endeavour that most often relies on human interactions and the provision of resources. In this volume, we elaborate on the need for leadership that may promote inclusion in HE. We are aware that HE is experiencing transformation due to gender issues, that HE institutions are grappling with the inclusion of women in leadership roles, and that admission of female students in some disciplines has taken a priority as an equity goal.

The provision and allocation of technology to aid inclusion through the use of relevant assistive devices has in many ways become part of the universal learning design, which has proved to be important for inclusion in HE. We also focus on the necessary adaptations of infrastructure to ensure mobility and institutional access and the creation of an enabling environment for inclusion in HE.

### ***Teaching and Learning***

For inclusive education to succeed, teaching and learning is central. In this volume, we elaborate on issues of epistemic access and support for teaching and learning. We do this by highlighting the significance of inclusive curriculum and how it is critical for inclusive learning. In this volume, barriers to inclusive HE are illuminated both from the perspective of teaching, learning, and environment. The notion of inclusive assessment in HE is conceptualised in the context of inclusive HE.

### ***Methodology***

The methodological approaches in this volume are informed by the social justice approach to equity, equality, and inclusion. As [Adams et al. \(2022\)](#) postulate that there are five critical elements of social justice education practice, i.e.

considering the roles of facilitators and participants in the learning community; fostering an inclusive learning community; centring an analysis of systems of oppression and how they operate in society and the classroom; defining goals, learning objectives, and evaluation mechanisms; and utilising collaborative and active learning. (p. 1)

To unravel these five principles, the authors, through different chapters, scope the extent of inclusion, exclusion, equity, equality and access, and quantitative approaches are applied, while qualitative methods are applied to understand the social constructions. The chapters adopt various lenses based on the area they are exploring. In this volume, frameworks within decolonising, disability, transformative, and critical emancipatory paradigms are employed.

Therefore, all the lenses adopted in this volume contribute towards the attainment of the following objectives:

- Analyse the current state of equity, access, equality, and inclusion in the South African further and HE.
- Identify some successes, opportunities, and challenges of inclusion in further and HE.
- Discuss implications for studies and make recommendations going forward.

The following is an executive summary of each chapter and aspects that address the objectives of this volume.

## **Executive Summary**

### ***Chapter 2: The Historical Development of Inclusive Education in South Africa: Higher Education Perspectives***

This chapter provides theoretical orientation and principles of inclusion and how those relate to the HE context. This is done from a human rights and social justice perspective. A comprehensive account of the development of inclusive education in South Africa is provided with discussions centred on how inclusion is conceptualised, enacted, and practised within the HE sector. The chapter also provides context with reference to HE, including policy development, challenges, successes, and opportunities.

### ***Chapter 3: Education Barriers in Higher Education***

According to [Maree \(2014\)](#) while the burden of access and success of students is based squarely on HE institutions, there needs to be a comprehensive intervention that focusses on both schools and universities to improve throughputs. This chapter highlights the barriers that affect the access and inclusion of diverse students in institutions of higher learning. These are discussed from the perspectives of institutional barriers ([Grant, 2015](#)) infrastructures, curriculum delivery, student attributes epistemic processes, and others.

#### ***Chapter 4: Higher Education Curriculum and Inclusion***

Stentiford and Koutsouris (2022) postulate that the notion of inclusive curriculum is understood differently in HE based on the conceptions of those involved. However, there is consensus about what inclusive curriculum should seek to achieve, i.e. to provide support to those experiencing exclusion or barriers to educational success. In this chapter, the notion of curriculum is conceptualised, and the concept of an inclusive curriculum is explained. The nuances of inclusive curriculum development, delivery, and assessment are foregrounded. The chapter provides an analysis of inclusive curriculum practices in the South African HE context and thus makes recommendations about how an inclusive curriculum could be developed.

#### ***Chapter 5: Strategies of Support for Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education***

There are different approaches towards inclusive teaching and learning. The Universal Design for Learning is one of the prominent approaches to how teaching and learning can be configured. Hockings et al. (2012) advocate for open education resources. In this chapter, the notion of an inclusive teaching strategy is conceptualised, and strategies used for enhancing equity and inclusion to support diverse students are unpacked. These are discussed in the context of South African HE. The chapter makes some recommendations about relevant and appropriate strategies in the South African context.

#### ***Chapter 6: Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education***

Bain (2023, p. 1) ‘defines inclusive assessment as the provision of assessments that allow all students to do well without receiving alternative or adapted assessments’. Bain further avers that assessment should be considered part of a more comprehensive and broader aspect of pedagogy and may not be treated in isolation. This chapter, therefore, conceptualises the notion of inclusive assessment and illuminates how it is operationalised, enacted, and practised within the South African HE context. Challenges, successes, and opportunities for inclusive assessments are highlighted.

#### ***Chapter 7: Decolonisation of Higher Education, Indigenous Knowledge, and Inclusion***

There is a view that decolonising HE and its curriculum may include the introduction of indigenous knowledge. This view purports that cultural artefacts mediate knowledge, and, as such, to include the marginalised; they need to see themselves in the curriculum. However, in the literature, some believe decolonising the curriculum might disrupt the academic project (Senekal & Lenz, 2020). This chapter highlights those contestations of decolonising and brings the debate to the fore. The chapter takes stock of the extent of decolonisation and its impact on epistemic access, ensuring equity and casing inclusion, particularly for the previously marginalised.